

Discrimination Takes Many Forms

By LuAnne Veham

LuAnne is a child development specialist at Orange Coast College in the Early Childhood Lab School. She is Vice President of Children's Education for the Orange County AEYC. She was an intern in the fourth group of the Leadership in Diversity Training.

Today, September 14, 2000, would have been my dad's 76th birthday. My dad grew up on a small farm in Minnesota. He went to a one-room schoolhouse through sixth grade when he was needed to work full time on the farm. When he was 18 years old he married my mom and over the next 18 years they had seven children.

After World War II they moved to the City of Minneapolis. Dad got a job he hated, working in an iron foundry. It was very hard work in temperatures reaching 105 degrees. He worked there for many years.

When I was about eight years old, Dad quit the foundry job, bought a big dump truck and started his own trash hauling business. This was an embarrassment for us children. The truck was parked in our backyard. It had our name and phone number on it. He worked all over the city and would sometimes drive by our school during recess time. When I would answer our phone someone often would ask, "Is this the trash man?"

One morning in Sunday school when I was 12 years old the teacher was trying to explain how people in biblical times looked down on another group of people. She said, "Like how people today look down on trash men." As I was sitting there, I knew all the kids in class knew that my dad was the trash man. I felt like a piece of trash. It felt like the longest hour of my life. After church, I remember running all the way home, with tears streaming down my face. Isn't church a place where you are supposed to feel safe?

My dad died of cancer shortly after he turned 48 years old. Next spring I will be 48 and I have thought about my dad often this year, about how people said he was the kind of man who would give you the shirt off his back, about how hard he worked all his life, and about how young he was when he died.

If I could go back in time, I would thank my dad for all of his hard work and tell him that I am very sorry that I was so ashamed of a job he loved. I would tell the Sunday school teacher to be careful of the words she uses, because we never know how much something that we say can hurt another person.